SACS COC Expectations for Quality Enhancement Plans

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Why Accreditation by SACS COC$^1$?

• The Department of Education (federal) requires that institutions that receive federal funding (financial aid and other) be accredited by an approved accrediting agency – SACS COC is the regional accrediting agency approved by the DOE

• Translation: you lose all federal funding for financial aid (and other sources) if you are not accredited; if you engage in practices that are not acceptable you may be asked to RETURN funding

• SACS COC Accreditation is thus MUCH more important than discipline-based accreditations for an institution

1 Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges
What Does “Reaffirmation of Accreditation” by SACS COC Involve?

Two Components:

• Compliance Certification:
  – 16 “Core Requirements
  – 66 “Comprehensive Standards”
  – 7 “Federal Requirements”

• Quality Enhancement Plan – designed to ensure that the institution engages in activities that will result in improvements to student learning and related to institutional planning and mission.
Core Requirement 2.12:
The institution has developed an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) that includes an institutional process for identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment and focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution.

Comprehensive Standard 3.3.2:
The institution has developed a Quality Enhancement Plan that (1) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP; (2) includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP; and (3) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement.
Components of an Acceptable QEP

For the **Core Requirement:**

- Includes a process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment
- Focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution

Together, these two components clearly focus the QEP topic on **STUDENT LEARNING**, so:

- Focuses on the need to tie the topic to information that you have about the institution – particularly student learning “needs” that come from that information.
- Focuses on ensuring that the primary focus is in improving student learning!
What is meant by “student learning”

- Knowledge – facts, concepts, theories that students have acquired and (often) can apply
- Cognitive Skills – problem solving, critical thinking, creativity/creative thinking, etc.
- Behaviors – skills, abilities that students can be observed doing or having done
- Attitudes, Values, Beliefs – internal systems that are essential for students to acquire as a result of their educational and co-curricular experiences
What is meant by “the environment supporting student learning”

- Curriculum
- Instruction
- Technology and other Learning Support Systems
- Faculty Instructional Skills
- Etc.: That is, those things that, if improved, will result in improvement of student learning!

NOTES:

1. if you focus on these, you STILL must show how student learning is improved by improving these “environments”!

2. Most QEPs include these as strategies/processes that are to be improved for the improvement of specific student learning outcomes.

EXAMPLE: UTSA’s QEP: *Quantitative Scholarship: From Literacy to Mastery*
UTSA’s QEP as an Example

• Student Learning Outcomes:
  – Quantitative “literacy” skills (i.e., not just “more math”)
  – Writing (as a component necessary for literacy)

• Focus:
  – Core Curriculum Courses and Selected Upper-Division Courses

• “Environment” to be improved:
  – Faculty teaching skills
  – Course content
  – TA teaching/assistance skills
  – Increased number of courses with quantitative components
Components of an Acceptable QEP

For the Comprehensive Standard:

1. Demonstrates *institutional capability* for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP
2. Includes *broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies* in the development and proposed *implementation* of the QEP
3. Identifies *goals and a plan to assess* their achievement.
Institutional Capability

• Personnel
  – Who was involved in developing the QEP?
  – Who will be involved in implementation?
    • Are individuals identified or is a job description available?

• Organizational Commitment
  – Support from Executives
  – Support from Community (including students as appropriate)

• Organizational Structure
  – Who reports to whom?
  – Who is accountable for what?

• Funding and Facilities (as appropriate)
  – Detailed budget needed
  – Sufficient resources to carry out plan
  – No dependence on “soft money”!
Broad-Based Involvement

• In the Development of the QEP:
  – Was the plan generated so that all affected community members could contribute ideas?
  – Was the plan designed by a group that appropriately represented the community?
  – Was proposal “vetted” to allow for input from constituencies?

• In the Implementation of the QEP:
  – Is there appropriate involvement of all constituencies?
    • In carrying-out the plan
    • In administration of the plan
    • In evaluating the plan
Goals

Three Types of Goals:

• Overall Goals for the QEP
  – Very general statements of expected impact of QEP
    • For example: “The QEP will develop critical thinking skills in students.”

• Student Learning Goals/Outcomes
  – Expected outcomes – what students should know, be able to do, value, etc. as a result of the plan’s actions
    • For example: “Students will be able to solve problems associated with discipline-related issues through course-based exercises.”

• “Implementation Goals”
  – What will be accomplished and when?
    • For example: “5 faculty workshops, with 10 faculty members each, will be held during each summer during the tenure of the QEP.”
  – What specific things will the strategies provide?
    • For example: “The faculty development workshop will enable faculty members to include exercises, lectures, and other course materials that promote critical thinking in their disciplines.”
Assessment

• Overall Goals: through assessment of other “layers”
• Student Learning: through various means, including course-embedded assessments, standardized instruments, faculty-developed instruments, etc.
• Implementation: through tracking of events; also, through follow-ups to see if intended outcomes achieved.
What Do Evaluators Look For?

- **Has the topic been developed after considering the needs of the university and its students?**
  - Is it connected to the institution’s planning process?
  - Is there existing “data” showing a need?
  - Has there been appropriate involvement of the university community in both identifying the topic and in developing the QEP?

- **Does the topic focus on the improvement of student learning?**
  - Has student learning been defined appropriately?
  - Are there specific outcomes for student learning?

- **Is there a detailed assessment plan? This must have TWO components:**
  - Assessment of outcomes (including student learning outcomes)
  - Assessment of “process” – i.e., an assessment of the progress toward accomplishment/implementation of the plan

- **Has the institution clearly demonstrated “capability” to carry out the plan?**
  - Have sufficient resources been committed to carrying out the plan over 5 years?
  - Have the necessary personnel been identified?
  - Has a detailed budget been developed and approved?

- **SEE HANDOUT!**
Successful Implementation of the QEP Requires:

- Clear understanding of the purpose, goals, outcomes
- A unified institutional effort behind the plan that includes strong support of the administration
- A leadership structure that is charged with carrying out the QEP
- An accountability system in place so that QEP leadership will be able to carry out its charge and so that the leadership is held accountable for carrying out its charge
- An effective assessment process in place to monitor student learning and key implementation goals/outcomes
Examples (from COC website)

- **Writing Realized: Developing Writing Literacies in a Technological Age** (Albany State U.)
- **Critical Thinking through Writing** (Georgia State U.)
- **R.E.A.S.O.N: Creating Coherent Pathways to Develop Critical Thinking Skills in Students** (Norfolk State U.)
- **Lobo Stars: Enhancing Academic Learning through Student Engagement** (Sul Ross State U.)
- **Learning through Discovery** (U. Houston)
- **GEMS—Gateways to Excellence in Math and Science** (UT Dallas)
- **Developing a Culture of Writing to Enhance Students’ Academic and Professional Success** (Virginia State U.)

Go to: [http://www.sacscoc.org/inst_forms_and_info1.asp](http://www.sacscoc.org/inst_forms_and_info1.asp) going back to “class of 2004”
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